

Telling Your Story

A referee supplement for use with the MEP Light System

This section is designed to inform the referee as to what his role and position is in the game, as well, as instruct him or her on how the games are set up, and how to use the resources for the game to maximize his or hers and the game's ability.

Role-Playing

The art of role-playing is a very fun and exciting form of expression / release. Having the ability to create your own worlds and place a measurement on these worlds is very fascinating and fulfilling. Role-playing can be much more than a game, as well as, much more than a play. It has the capacity to allow one to put his ideas to paper, giving them measurement, and pulling them closer to tangibility. It also allows one to tell a story, or act in a sort of play, conveying his or her thoughts, dreams, and ideas in many different manners.

Referee

Referee is the title of the individual controlling the game. The referee creates the worlds, realms as they are referred, and allows the characters in the game to play in the worlds he has designed. It is he who has autonomy over the game. He informs the characters, as to what goes on in the game, and what they are experiencing in their environment. He tells the story and plays the parts of everyone (besides the players). The following is some information about what it is the referee does.

Roles of the Referee

Autonomy

First and foremost, as the referee, you have complete autonomy as to what goes on in your game. How the realm is structured, how particular scenes are set up when players are engaged in combat, what the characters are and are not capable of, everything. Since it is up to you to give the players new challenges, you have the autonomy.

Fairness

Having complete control of the game is a great responsibility. You must at all times be fair. This is not a game of you against the players. This is a game of friends coming together to enjoy an evening of adventure and role-playing.

For example, if the players breeze through a particular encounter you spent hours devising, and were overexcited to get the player's characters there, don't get mad and seek revenge on the characters, these things happen. If you wanted something to happen to a character that really develops your storyline and opens up new possibilities, but the character escapes your plans, don't make it happen, just wait for another opportunity to work your ideas into your game.

Don't show favoritism to any particular player. Give everyone a fair chance to have fun. It is up to you to keep all of the players satisfied and in action. Just remember, if you want your game to be memorable, and have the flow that its suppose to, BE FAIR.

Arguments

Having a game without an argument at some point doesn't happen often. When an argument occurs in the game, and is between two players, be totally impartial, show no favoritism and most importantly, listen. Hear both sides out, then decide which is more prudent to the game, offer a compromise, or allow each to attempt his or her own suggestion. In all cases, be fair.

Telling a Story

As the referee, it is your job to tell an interactive story. This may involve a long, complex storyline, or be simple yet very philosophical, anything. Your story needs to consist of an idea and/or point you desire to share with other people.

All of us have set around and listened to or read stories our whole lives. They excite the imagination, and leave us begging for more information about a certain plot or character involved. They capture our souls and inspire us with their morals and ideas. This is the basic concept of running a game. Gaming takes the story to a whole new plateau, for it allows other people to interact with it, making its allurements and excitement tenfold.

To achieve this, while running your game, you must have a keen ear, and a sharp tongue. This requires practice. To make the game successful, you must be able to describe the settings and events to the players, listen to their reactions of your descriptions, and adjust settings and events to their reactions.

Being able to interact in an imaginary world with results is what makes role-playing popular. This is the most important tool for successful games. When players can partake in events that they can't in normal life, they naturally feel a sense satisfaction and gratification. If your game does not provide this, it is doomed.

Tips on Storytelling

- First and foremost, this is a game. The object of which is to have fun. You have to make the game entertaining if it is to survive. You must make the players feel as though they are part of the game. Most importantly, you must include everyone equally.
- Once the game has started, keep it going. Feed on the actions and the imaginations of the players. Remember, the more you inspire them, the more you have to feed upon.
- If there are no encounters planned, skip uninteresting events such as camping or riding a horse to the next town. All that needs to be said is something to the effect of, "You trod down the path for several hours, enjoying the scenery. Other than stopping at a spring for a few short minutes to water your horse, the trip was uneventful."
- Create interesting NPCs. While everyone would expect a villain to have a developed personality, don't be afraid to add a little flare to the common shopkeep. Such encounters create vivid gaming experiences.
- Don't clutter with pulp rubbish. If it isn't necessary to go into a half-hour spill on the complete history of a race of people that the characters will spend ten minutes with, Don't. You may end up confusing the plot, thus threatening the storyline. This doesn't mean exclude it completely, just shorten it.
- Draw your ideas from every facet you can imagine; books, magazines, art, science, philosophy, TV, movies, history, etc.

Tips on Story Design

Dialogue

Dialogue is the most important factor in a game. It provides the greatest example of interaction. While you don't have to be skilled in it, it is detrimental to the game.

During a game, when characters engage in dialogue, it is important that they actually engage in dialogue. This makes the game more like a play. They do not have to dress in costumes or speak in silly dialects to achieve dialogue. It is important, however, that they communicate with others.

For example, if a king would like to partition the players to take on a quest for him, the referee needs to do more than say, "the king asks you if you'd do him a favor." This happens all too often, and is NOT role-playing. It is direct description of an option in the game.

Role-playing consists of taking on a role and playing that role. It is the referee's duty to play the role of the king. Instead of, "the king asks you if you'd do him a favor," try playing the king, saying something like, "I have summoned you for a purpose. My will is for you to partake in a quest for the glory of this kingdom. And while you will be in great danger, such does not go without equal reward". This is the primary factor of making the game interactive. Of course not all dialogue need be complex and wordy, to serve its purpose. It does however, need to exist.

You also should not tolerate the players' lifeless responses if constructed like the one the previous example. Instead of them saying, "I tell the king, 'sure' ", encourage them to play their roles.

Referee Role-Playing

As the referee, you get the most diverse role to play that of everyone, except the players' characters. It is the referee's job to play every person, from barkeep to king that the player's characters may encounter during an adventure. Of course, you don't need statistics for these people; you just need to do their part of the dialogue.

Being able to change your reactions from that of a grumpy old man to that of a kind and generous knight requires a little practice, and convincing yourself that you are not schizophrenic. When you are capable of this, your game truly takes on a life of its own, capable of providing moments in role-playing that are discussed years after the initial encounter.

Balance

Mechanically speaking, balance is the most important aspect of the game. You can provide all of the dialogue and neat adventure ideas you want, but if balance is disrupted, then the challenge of the game is lost. Without that sense of challenge constantly holding the characters in awe, the game grows storry quickly. If balance can not be regained, you won't have much of a game.

For example, if you have a fifth level character in your game that has a weapon that can destroy an entire civilization, and he uses this weapon on every possible occasion, where's the challenge? In retrospect, if the players have solved puzzles, conquered impossible odds, and played their characters to the fullest extent, managing to work well with one another, and you have never rewarded them for their efforts, there is no challenge, for there is no evolution in the game.

Keeping the balance in your games is a constant task that can not easily be achieved. If balance starts to slip from your grasps, bring it back somehow. If this requires getting rid of that doomsday weapon, or toning it down a little, do it, within the events of the game. Make the

character lose it, have it stolen, or destroyed and listen to no complaints. This is your game. Be fair and balanced. In the future, stop these things from happening, before it gets out of hand.

Describing the Scene

When telling your story, it is important that you describe the environment to the players. There are many methods in achieving the proper description. It will take practice, and can easily be over or underdone.

Overdescribing

Overdescribing scenery can be bad for a game, as a steady flow of words leave nothing to imagine, taking away the excitement and suspense, eventually leading to bored, uninterested players. For example, "Approaching a copse of trees, twisted and rotten, the cool wind clacks their branches together, as though whispering storys of ancient evils. As this sends a tingle up your spine, you note the architecture of their contorted shapes, which forms a dome, enclosing an area measuring twenty feet in diameter. With very little light breaking through the monstrosity of nature, you note the vague shape of an oddly quarried stone, whose geometry is reminiscent of extra-planar thought. Studying the stone, you notice the engravings of archaic runes that conform in a demented, phonetic dance with the semblance of tribal culture."

While good in short spurts, pulp rambling often fails to inspire after a period of time and eventually becomes boring. It overloads the senses, leaving little work for the imagination. Constant exposure to such rambling can condition players to this style of description. They will become disinterested when you run out of colorful adjectives.

Underdescribing

Underdescribing scenery can leave the players wanting, making it difficult to grasp what you see in your mind. Telling them, "you enter an area of dead trees with a clearing in the middle. In the middle of the clearing is a rock with stuff written on it" is a little vague and uninteresting, leaving the imagination uninspired.

Underdescribing may, in some cases, lead to unfair disaster. For example, if you have devised a trap for the players, and do not mention anything about it, such as "an oddly shaped misplaced stone just ahead in the road", and spring the trap without any warning, the players may become very upset. While you don't have to give details on the trap, you do need to give some form of subtle sign.

Descriptive Balance

A good referee should always try to create a detail rich environment, without under or overdescribing the scenery. On occasions, concise description may be required. For the most part, you should settle for an equal and consistent balance of description, a style that sparks interest. Don't make the scene bland and void of description and remember that oversensationalism is useful at times, but can easily be overdone.

Events

Events are encounters in the game, whether it be fighting a monster or meeting with an important NPC. They are used during the story to allow plot twists in which the characters have the decision of which path to take next.

There are many things that must be done when creating your interactive story. It is not so important that you spend hours designing villains, traps, and maps as it is to establish a setting that allows your ideas and points to flow forth into the gaming world.

If you are new to designing games you will quickly find that PCs are not going to select the paths you worked on the most. How to get around this; don't waste your time designing them. Instead make a general outline of events you would like to see transpire. Give the players options and suggestions, but never force them into a situation. Half the fun in role-playing requires the players to spin the story as much as the referee. When the players react unexpectedly to events in the game, don't ruin the mood by forcing them to go along with the storyline. Shape the storyline around their reactions; improvise.

Improvising

When you've spent an entire week shaping an adventure around an event that promises to change its tone and reveal to the players a key piece of information, don't be surprised when it backfires. Many veteran players pun about how events never go as planned in a game. This is somewhat true. I've been a gamer longer than I haven't and I must concede that from paper to play, very seldom does a planned encounter run its course unscathed by the antics of the players. What to do? Don't get mad; improvise.

Improvising is the key element to creating an interactive story and is what makes role-playing exciting. While it is painful to see hours of work ruined by a random whim, the referee must roll with the punches and alter the event to fit play.

For example, you have devised a plan for the "bad guys" to capture one of the PCs. Once the PC is captured, the others must find the enemy's hideout and rescue their comrade. This act will reveal much about the structure of the enemy's organization, as well as provide the vital information for which the PCs have come to this place.

As luck would have it, the PCs beat the stuffing out of the guys who were there to capture the target PC, and after you went to all that trouble working on the layout of the "bad guys" hideout. What to do? Its not fair to make the PC get captured anyway. They fought their way through your trap, fair and square. Instead of retaliation against the players, have one of the thugs confess the location of the hideout to the PCs.

Players seldom want to do what you've prepared. I can't recall how many times I've prepared a nice adventure, placed in a folder, and ended up watching the folder, and its contents lay on the floor untouched during the entire game.

If you give the players the option of going to rescue the maiden or slaying the dragon, and you've only prepared for the dragon, don't be surprised when they choose to rescue the maiden. Don't force them into slaying the dragon. Let them choose what paths they take. If you're not prepared, and don't want to adlib, don't provide the option.

Adlibbing

Adlibbing is when you tell your story without any prearranged ideas. Adlibbing goes hand in hand with improvising. Every game session will involve adlibbing to a degree, unless you plan to write all of the dialogue.

Most of the games I have run in the past few years consisted of my showing up with dice and saying, "OK, where did we leave off?" From there the game begins; no maps, no planned encounters, no predefined events. I merely let fate be my guide, and spun the story playing a game of action-reaction teeter-totter. The players would tell me what they wanted to do, I would react. Then they would react to my reaction. Many of my fondest gaming memories were orchestrated completely using adlibbing. Some of which are still mentioned from time to time.

The talent to improvise and adlib is a must for players and referees alike and should come natural. If a situation is not going as planned, roll with the punches. Allow it to come up again later, or find another way for the event to take place. In any case, don't punish the players for being players. Besides, you may find yourself in a situation that becomes the subject of conversation years from its original occurrence.

Procedures

This section is devoted to specific procedures in the game. While there is an infinite amount of possible events and situations that can occur in a game that tries to cover everything, the procedures that are included are common procedures and universals that may apply to events and situations that occur anywhere and anytime. If there is an issue that is not mentioned in this section, then feel free to sit down with your playing group and decide on a rule that is fair and apply it to that issue. In all instances, the referee has complete and final say so on any matter.

Vision

The use of vision is very important in this game, as well is the explanation of different types of vision. The use of vision applies just as it does in reality. Unless you have some special abilities, you can't see around corners or through solid, non-transparent matter. The distance your character can see is average. Unless otherwise stated, your character can see about as well as you can. Terrain and environment also effects vision. It is up to the referee to use common sense when describing to characters what they can and can not see.

There are basically four types of vision in contemporary role-playing; normal, infravision, sonic, and magical. Normal is common vision; the stereoscopic bending and processing of light to produce dimension definition and color. As a basic rule of thumb, in moonlight or bright artificial light, a character can effectively see 100 ft. In starlight, torch, or flashlight normal vision is reduced to 30 ft. In total darkness, the absence of light, the character is completely blind, for there is no light to filter or process.

Infravision, on the other hand, has two forms; classical and scientific. Whichever of these two is applied, depends on the referee. Classical infravision refers to a character or creature merely being able to see in total darkness. Dimension and shape is defined, but the lack of light produces no color. Scientific infravision refers to the being having the capacity to view objects in heat patterns. Dimension is often distorted, for lack of stereoscopy, but definition of shape is usually better defined. Characters or creatures seeing in scientific infravision see cooler objects on the blue end of the spectrum, and warmer objects on the red end of the spectrum. Very cool objects produce black, while very warm objects may appear white. The amount of light greatly effects infravision. The more light, the more hampered it becomes. In moonlight or bright artificial light, character may only see 30 ft., in starlight, torch, or flashlight, vision is reduced to 100 ft. In total darkness vision is 200 ft.

Sonic vision is very uncommon, but still demands attention. Characters or creatures with sonic vision use sound waves to define distance and shape of objects. They can not process light effectively and any other form of light vision produces nothing more than a large blur.

Magic vision has many forms. It usually represents one of the more basic forms of vision; normal, infravision, or sonic, but in a different way. Take clairvoyance for example. A character using clairvoyance is actually seeing through the eyes of another being using that being's type of vision. Magical visions are hardly ever used as a primary form of vision. When magical vision is available for a character

template or creature, the manner of how it works will be discussed when it is referred to.

Hearing

Hearing has about the same principles as vision. There are normal and magical effects for hearing. Most races hear about as well as we normally do, your character included. If a reference is given to amplified or heightened hearing, the measurement of just how sensitive the race's or creature's hearing is will be explained when it is referred to.

Movement

Movement has been simplified to simply in and out of a confrontation. Normally, if it makes sense that the character may move that far, allow it. For example, a character saying, "I want to spend a turn to dive behind the boxes in the corner," makes sense. "I want to spend a turn to run back to the base," doesn't; that is unless the character has some sort of special power that would allow him to move that fast.

Optional Rule: Realistic Wounds

Normally when a character has points scored against him, at the end of the confrontation, those points are restored if he is able to rest for three rounds. With this optional rule, if four or more points are scored against the character from a single roll, one of those points is not restored until the end of the story. This is referred to as a critical score.

For example, Blackguard, a hero from Hero 8™ with 16 points has eight rolls made against him in a confrontation. Five of them are successful, scoring points. The points scored were 2, 1, 4, 6, and 1 totaling 14 point. The 4 and 6 score in the critical range. At the end of the confrontation, only 12 points are restored, instead of the normal 14 because of the two critical scores.

Skipped Time and Assumed Actions

It would be impossible, as well as, pointless to attempt to keep track of every second that passes and every action that the characters take while not in combat. Sometimes it is good to assume actions, such as sleeping and eating if the characters are to be traveling for days. It isn't necessary to include every detail of information of a book a character is reading while doing research, or actually playing to the second, the time the character spends on research. In situations like these, it is always good to skip time and assume actions.

NPCs

Non-player characters (NPC) are characters that aren't played by a player. Instead their roles are played by the referee. More than the common innkeeper, merchant, cobbler; NPCs are fully developed characters that are used to interact with the player's characters on an equal level. They can be a lifelong ally, adventuring companion, or even a mortal enemy.

It is pointless to make a character, or even record statistics, for every person the player's characters will encounter while on an adventure. It is a waste of time. The characters will chat with the guy, buy some equipment or information, and never see him again.

NPCs are those guys that keep sticking around. They are designed to interact with the PCs on multiple occasions, and on a level other than buying information or equipment. These individuals fight

with or against the PCs, likely on more than one occasion, and therefore require the statistics of a character, as well as the personality development that goes into making a character. When making a NPC for use in a game, follow the exact steps as creating a character.

Realm Creation

Designing your own campaign worlds can be a complicated task. This section is designed to acquaint you with realms. What they are, how they are structured, how to design them and how to use the resources provided to the fullest of their extent is discussed in this section.

Realms

Realms are gaming worlds. They are the settings the referee designs to use in his campaign and where the players play the game.

Realm Structure

To keep things organized, realms are broken down into four basic parts; concept, tone, timeframe and setting. The following explains each in detail.

Realm Concept

A Realm's concept is the most important piece of information about a realm, for it defines its general structure. The realm's concept dictates a general idea about the technology levels of the realm, what resources would be available, what character foci and creatures are common, social structures, if magic is available, etc. The realm concept allows you to know basically what type of world the realm is and may be composed of anything you desire.

The realm concept is usually a particular gaming genre, such as fantasy or space opera, or a variant of one or more gaming genre.

Tone

Tone is the second most important factor in constructing a realm. The tone of a realm refers to its manner of expression, or attitude. Tone gives the basis for the setting, and breathes the first breath of life into a realm.

There are near infinite possibilities for the tone of a realm. Often combinations of two or more tones are required to give the realm the personality and uniqueness the referee is trying to capture.

Tone is not a factor to be considered lightly. When deciding how to describe the tone of a realm, think for a moment on what makes that realm so unique.

A good example of tone is gothic, which is very popular in contemporary gaming. Gothic tones have a Teutonic flavor, relating itself to the architectural motifs expressed during the late Middle Ages, originating in Germanic cultures.

Gothic ideology often paints a wondrous scene adorned with jutting spires, pointed arches, and rib vaulting, which invokes a sense of religion and fear. Because of this, gothic takes on a tone that associates itself with a sense of dark religion, painting visages of centuries old catholic churches containing a sense of hauntedness about everything. The perfect setting for counterculture.

Mediocre tones are also very common, for they express a placated simpleness about the realm, giving the normal feel and attitude as befits the environment. Whatever the referee decides for the tone of a particular realm, he should always make sure that a realm's composition is dictated by its tone.

Timeframe

Before the actual setting is determined, the third and final pre-setting factor must be established, its timeframe. While you may refer to the time in which a realm is set by using eras or actual years, the realm's timeframe indicates the technology level of the realm. This allows the game's concept of time to be simplified. Eras and years are flavor, and are actually part of the setting.

There are three timeframes that exist in the MEP light system. They are past, modern, and future. Past is the timeframe that refers to realms that would fall into any era from neandertal to medieval like technologies. Modern refers to any era of time in a realm that has technology ranging from pre- and semi- industrial age to our own present time. This transition to modern could be marked by events like the discovery of gunpowder, or an age of renaissance. The future time frame refers to realms that are set in the future. Technologies that mark the transition from modern to future are events like the mastering of energy technologies such as, laser, nuclear, and plasma; to events like intersystem and intergalactic space travel.

It is appropriate to note that sometimes the realm's concept automatically dictates the timeframe of the realm. For example, while a particular fantasy realm may have some higher technological concepts, fantasy realms are always set in the past. The same applies to high-tech realms being set in the future.

Setting

All of the above help dictate setting. One may even argue that the three above mentioned are the setting. But for lack of a better term, and use of a familiar one, setting is defined as the actual physical characteristics of the realm. It is this portion of realm creation that you create the tangibility of the realm in your mind's eye. It is the most difficult task in realm creation, and requires the most use of imagination. There are three basic factors in dealing with setting. They are; resource, form, and flavor.

Resources

Resources help build certain physical characteristics of a realm, such as determining common equipment available, outfitting an army, setting social standards, etc. The resources in this book, are not only for character use, but are tools to help you design your setting. They are compiled and listed by the most appropriate timeframe.

The resources attempt to allow the referee to create anything he desires. This does so by arranging all of the book's resources in a "skeleton" format, allowing the referee to build his ideas from the ground up. Wordy techno-babble and special effects of equipment are not listed. If an item does contain some special effect, that is for the designer to add on his own. When you can't find the resources you desire, you can always create them yourself.

Form

Form refers to the geography of the realm. The size of kingdoms and countries, the lay of mountains and rivers; where cities, villages, temples, military outposts and bases, dungeons and lairs are located. All geography, as well as, populations are part of the form.

A very important note about the realm's form is that it is pointless to attempt to create the entire realm in one setting. What you should do instead is create a small area, such as a town, city, or kingdom for the characters play in before expanding the realm. You might decide that the city is large enough to suffice, and merely make it the realm.

Flavor

Flavor is the portion of realm creation, which requires the most creativity, for it is where all of the intricacies of the realm that you created are incorporated into the equation. Factions and political organizations, military leaders, kings, emperors, army units and sizes, the actual year or era, calendars and holidays, ceremonies and rites of a particular culture, are examples of flavor at work.

All manners of detail from important people to a nation's most valuable resource are part of the flavor of a realm, and you may decide to go as in-depth as you choose with it. While some may settle with a few important people and places, others may want to work in a lot of intricate details for possible future use. This all depends on the referee designing the realm, however, flavor has no limits and no realm is ever complete without at least a little.

Miscellaneous Items

Designing the environment of a particular location in a setting is required, for it is the main level at which the characters interact in the game. While creating things such as cities in the sky, you also have to consider the locations characters have their encounters; alleys, rooms, taverns, etc.

When designing a location in a particular setting, you always have to consider miscellaneous items. What is the layout of the room? Where is the couch located? As you know, just like characters, all items in the game system have points. These points dictates how much the item can withstand before it is either destroyed or rendered useless. Below is a table of items that can be used as a general guideline for determining the points of certain items.

Item	Points
Box, Wooden Crate	3
Box, Metal	5
Windshield	6
Door, Wood	8
Door, Metal	13
Chair, Wooden	2
Barstool	2
Table, Wooden	5
Lock	4
Wall (5'X5' section)	
Wall, Plaster	8
Wall, Wooden	15
Wall, Metal	30
Wall, Cinder Block	25
Wall, Brick	20
Weapon, Wooden	3
Weapon, Metal	8
Pistol	2
Rifle	4
Window, Glass	3
Floor, Wooden	20